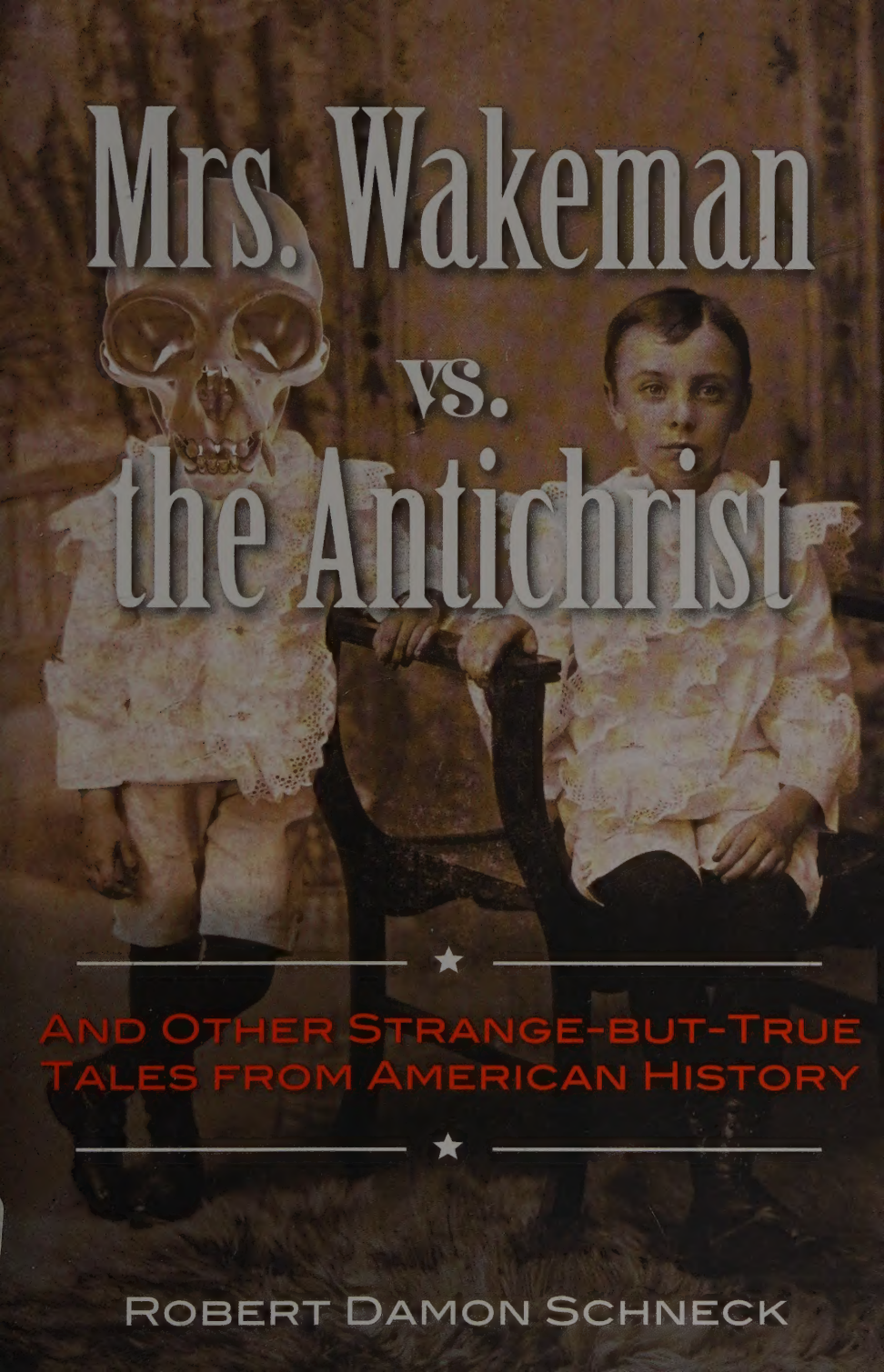
Mrs. Wakeman
vs.
the Antichrist
And Other Strange-but-True Tales from American History
Robert Damon Schneck

Bigfoot's Gold: The Secret of Ape Canyon

One night in the summer of 1924, a small group of angry, rock-throwing, ape-men attacked a cabin with five miners inside, near Mt. St. Helens, Washington. While most Sasquatch are content to stare at human beings and then vanish into the woods, these creatures seemed determined to get in and commit mayhem. It was unusual behavior for Bigfoot and the culmination of a series of strange events involving séances, spirits, and gold mining. Depending on one's perspective, what happened at Ape Canyon is either baffling and unique or utterly predictable, a twentieth-century example of a very old kind of story, not usually associated with our most prominent cryptid.

Thousands of encounters with hairy giants or their footprints have been recorded in North America, a handful of

which have become famous. These include the Patterson-Gimlin film, Jerry Crew's plaster casts, William Roe's detailed sighting, Albert Ostman's abduction, Ape Canyon, and a few other, more or less arguable, classics.

For scientifically minded Bigfoot investigators, these incidents involve living, breathing beings, possibly primitive men or apelike bipeds, which are no more paranormal than mule deer or yellow-bellied marmots. To Fred Beck, one of the miners at Ape Canyon the creatures were something very different.

It was not because their behavior was unusual. Bigfoot seldom threaten human beings, yet chimpanzees carry out organized hunts for red colobus monkeys, so there is no obvious reason why ape-men could not launch a coordinated assault on five of their small pink cousins.[1] What makes Ape Canyon unpalatable for those who want Bigfoot hunting to be scientific is the firsthand account published by Beck in 1967, titled *I Fought the Apemen of Mt. St. Helens.*

The booklet opens with a description of how the cabin was besieged by ape-men, and goes on to explain that the creatures were actually "manifestations," and just one of the many psychic phenomena experienced by the miners. Furthermore, they were Spiritualists who searched for gold with the help of spirits and saw visions. Beck describes childhood encounters with mysterious beings, discusses metaphysics, and makes passing references to flying saucers, the Fall of Man, and Ascended Masters. Taken together, they make *I*

Fought the Apemen the redheaded stepchild of Sasquatch literature.

Anything involving Bigfoot attracts the attention of cryptozoologists and the story has always been discussed in the context of cryptozoology, the study of "hidden animals." This is a scientific approach to creatures that might exist, like Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster, familiar species that appear outside their normal ranges (e.g., kangaroos in Wisconsin), and animals like the thylacine, which have been declared extinct, but could still survive. This chapter is an attempt to take *I Fought the Apemen* out of cryptozoology and consider Fred Beck's account as a tale belonging to another, older tradition.

The Becks

Beck's account is curious mixture of frontier life and mysticism, and reflects his background.

In 1880, William T. Beck; his wife, Ella; and their three small sons, Albert, John, and Jesse, arrived in the Washington Territory from Kansas.[2] They moved several times but mainly lived at Kelso, in Cowlitz County, a lumber town with so many taverns and brothels that it was called "Little Chicago." (In 1956, the chamber of commerce came up with the more wholesome sobriquet "Kelso, Smelt Capital of the World," but the smelts ran out and it is now known as the

"City of Friendly People.")[3] Mr. Beck planted apple trees and worked as a logger, so he was often away while his wife taught Sunday school, gave music lessons, and was active in Grand Army of the Republic veterans' affairs. The Beck family also grew; Georgianna was born in 1880, William in 1885, Alfred and his twin brother, Edwin, on July 22, 1888 (Edwin died in infancy), and Arthur in 1891. Arthur wrote a series of reminiscences about his family's history and life at Cowlitz County when it was still the frontier.

He described his mother as a "real pioneer woman" who helped deliver babies and "[t]o give the reader an insight as to how rugged life was in the early years . . . Coming home from school one day about 1898, I found my brother John seated on the porch sewing up a three-inch ax cut in his knee, using a darning needle and white cotton thread. If you doubt that requires grit, try it on your own knee."[4] School was four months a year, and a photograph taken in 1900 shows Miss Hargraves and her class from the Lower Coweeman School, with the younger boys wearing Little Lord Fauntleroy suits, the girls in pinafores, and all twenty-three students looking horribly serious except for Fred and Arthur Beck, who are smiling.[5] According to *I Fought the Apemen*, Fred was already having visions, and it is not surprising that the twelve-year-old clairvoyant stands somewhat apart from the group.

Even ordinary childhood incidents could be mysterious for the young Beck:

When just a boy I was in the pasture playing with my beanshooter. I had bought it with some long earned coins. It had a twisted wire handle. I lost it, and as I was crying, a kindly woman came up to me and put her arms around me. I felt warm all over. "Little boy," she said, "don't cry. Go home, you will find your beanshooter there."

I went home and found it, and as far as I knew then it was the same one. But years later I found the one I lost. It was weather beaten and the rubber was rotten.

Another woman was invisible to everyone except Fred:

I would be sleeping on the hard benches of the Adventist Church my folks used to attend, and I would have my head in a lady's lap, only when I mentioned it to my folks, they said there was no one else there and took it to be a boy's musings.

As the Becks matured they worked in blacksmith shops and mills and at various lumber camps. Logging was "more dangerous than war," and William, the fourth-born son, was killed in an accident in 1909.[6] At age twenty-two, Fred operated a donkey engine—a mechanical winch used for dragging heavy logs—and had his first encounter with an ape-man while working at a lumber camp near Kelso.

> One night I heard a rustling outside, and I heard something pushing its way under our tent. A tall hairy figure stood before us watching us. It scared my brother, who afterward said it was a large bear. But I have seen enough bears to know that it was no bear. There was nothing else he knew to call it.[7]

It was around this time that Beck "became immersed in spiritualism," the popular belief that the personality survives death and that it was possible to communicate with those who have passed on.

How he became involved is unknown, but it was typical, for "[t]hroughout his life, he espoused novel beliefs."[8] Meetings were held, and in time Beck "created a following of folks who sometimes gathered for séances. Some of his own brothers and his sister were intrigued with this activity. They enjoyed the experiences but their spouses were chagrined."[9]

Like Adventism and the Latter-day Saints movement, Spiritualism emerged from the religious revivals and social reform movements that "blazed" across upper and western New York State until the area was known as the "Burned-Over District." It began at rural Hydesville in 1848 with the Fox sisters, two girls who figured out how to communicate with a spirit haunting their farmhouse; from there it spread around the world with astonishing speed. Conversing with ghosts was not unprecedented: Twenty-seven years before Hydesville, a poltergeist spoke audibly, and insultingly, to the

people of Adams, Tennessee, answering their questions and making predictions. It haunted the Bell family and, since witchcraft was believed to be responsible for poltergeists, was known as the "Bell Witch." Spiritualists accepted the reality of such phenomena but not the traditional explanations.

Since Spiritualism "investigates, analyzes, and classifies facts and manifestations demonstrated from the Spirit side of Life," it was scientific, a constituted sort of Industrial Revolution of the spirit comparable to the other developments transforming nineteenth-century life.[10] For believers, 1848 marked the beginning of a new era in which the veil that separated the living and dead was lifted and one could converse "with angels and spirits as man with man."[11] The possibilities seemed limitless, and Article 2 of the 1876 *Platform and Constitution of the New Hampshire State Convention of Spiritualists* stresses the application of Spiritualism to "practical life," which would certainly include finding your own gold mine.[12]

Seance in the Pines

The prospectors were Fred Beck; his father-in-law, Marion Lefever Smith (called "Hank" in *I Fought the Apemen*); Smith's nineteen-year-old son, LeRoy; Gabe Lefever (probably Smith's cousin or nephew); John Peterson; and an unnamed man not present when the apes attacked.

Beck does not describe how they actually looked for gold beyond calling it "psychic," though a contemporary newspaper states, "It is said all five men are Spiritualists and hold frequent séances in the woods."[13] Each member of the party was "psychically sensitive," but as someone with experience in Spiritualist meetings, it is reasonable to assume that Beck played a leading role as medium.

Mediumship is the psychic ability to communicate with discarnate intelligences, including gods, angels, and spirits of the dead, through various mental and physical means. Mental mediums use automatic writing, automatic speech, clairaudience (psychically "hearing" voices, music, etc.), and inner visions, while physical mediums produce the more spectacular external phenomena: object movement, audible sounds and voices, levitation, ectoplasm (a polymorphic substance from the medium's body), production of apports (solid objects like fruit, flowers, or live animals), and the materialization of spirits. Beck and his party experienced a variety of physical manifestations during their years at Mt. St. Helens.

One Comforting and One Great Spirit

The men began prospecting in 1916 reportedly by holding séances and contacting spirits. They included "Vander White," who was a "comforting friend" but not much help in finding

gold mines, and a second being that did not manifest until August 1922, but showed them where to dig. According to *I Fought the Apemen*, a large Indian dressed in buckskin appeared to us and talked to us. He was the picture of stateliness itself. He never told us his name, but we always called him the Great Spirit. He replied once, "The Great Spirit is above me. We are all of the Great Spirit, if we listen when the Great Spirit talks."

More to the point:

> The big Indian being told us there would be a white arrow [going] before us. Another man, who was not present during the attack in 1924, could see the arrow easily and clearly at all times. And I could see it nearly as well.
>
> So we started by the Lewis River, south of Mt. St. Helens, and went up the Muddy River, and in all we followed the white arrow four days. The going was slow, for in those days it was very rugged territory. Hank's temper was growing short as he climbed the hills. He had always been a believer of spiritual things, and afterwards he was a believer. But he lost his temper and cussed. He swore at the spirit leading us. His face was red and we could not stop him: "Just a wild goose chase," he exclaimed, "they lied to us, and got us running all over the hills, and I want nothing more to do with them." He went on and on.

If any member of the group could be called their leader, it is "Hank," Marion Smith. He was older (b. 1866), and the father, father-in-law, and possibly uncle, to three of the men, as well as a "great hunter and good woodsman." His impatience and lack of self-control, however, was their undoing.

> Then just when he [Smith] had started to calm down, we all saw the arrow soar up high, change direction and swoop down. We had to follow in the general direction before we could find it again. It hovered near the top of the north cliff of Ape Canyon. That was the site where we later blasted out our shaft.
>
> We got a little closer, and we all saw the image of a large door open, and the big Indian appeared in front of it. He spoke: "Because you have cursed the spirit leading you, you will be shown where there is gold, but it is not given to you."
>
> With those words, he disappeared. Then we saw the door slowly close. There was a huge lock and latch, but as the door shut, the lock did not latch: a closed door but it was not locked! "We just as well pack up and go home," one of the party said.

After six years of looking, though, the temptation to dig proved irresistible, and they decided to make a claim. It required a written description and they had nothing to write

with, not until a pencil spontaneously materialized, or apported, into Fred's hand. Mabel Beck later recognized the pencil as one she bought when her husband was away. (Their four-year-old son Francis had been chewing on it, so she put the pencil away in a drawer, from which it later vanished.) On September 2, 1922, Beck and Smith filed a location notice for a mine named the Vander White, in honor of their spirit friend.[14]

It was located on a cliff side and the men had to lower themselves on ropes to reach a narrow ledge, which was enlarged with dynamite. From there they began burrowing into the canyon's north wall. Despite this apparent progress they felt as though the venture would fail, a disquiet that reflects one of the failures of Spiritualism.

In separating themselves from superstition with its primitive, often grotesque, elements, the Spiritualists also abandoned its wealth of accumulated knowledge. One result of this was seen at Mt. St. Helens, where the mediums-cum-miners repeatedly made mistakes that were addressed, if not always solved, by countless generations of traditional magical treasure hunters. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, old-fashioned "money-diggers" were thin on the ground, but America once had them in abundance.

Treasure hunting was part of the European magical tradition and remained a popular, if little discussed, pursuit in the United States until the twentieth century. Small groups

went out at night to perform ceremonies that revealed the whereabouts of treasure, casting spells that protected them from the supernatural forces standing guard.

Though treasure hunting was seldom successful, its practitioners would have understood exactly what was happening at Mt. St. Helens.

More Oddities

Beyond the daily round of séances, phantom arrows, and apports, Fred Beck found time to have unusual experiences on his own.

At some point he was off by himself and feeling lonely when a young woman appeared. They chatted and Beck was invited to visit the campsite she shared with her father.

> When I arrived at her camp, I did not see her father, and never did see him. She had a fire going, and a light colored blanket was spread out and she was sitting on it. It was a warm summer evening, and we held another pleasant conversation. I remember her telling me how she liked the fresh air of the mountains, and how wonderfully she loved nature.
>
> She would be talking on a subject, then pause and say, "Isn't that right, Dad?" This she said several times. There was no tent, cooking utensils, no food, and certaiply [*sic*]

no visible father. The most amazing thing was I did not at the time think her different than any other person. When she spoke to her invisible Dad, I felt just like her Dad was there.

I left her and walked back to camp, but my mind seemed like it was a thousand miles away. I could hear the other men talking, but it seemed like they were below me, and their voices sounded soft and distant.

I do not know anyone who had seen her but myself.

Beck was the only miner to enjoy a pleasantly surreal night out, but the group experienced other phenomena together. Thumping sounds were heard inside the earth and footprints discovered whose size and origin defied explanation.

There in the center of the sand bar were two huge tracks [nineteen inches long and] about four inches deep. There was not another track on that sand bar!

There we were standing in the middle of the sand bar, and not one of us could conceive any earthly thing taking steps 160 feet long. "No human being could have made these tracks," Hank said, "and there's only one way they could be made, something dropped from the sky and went back up."

Though the prints made Marion Smith uneasy, "no one was really worried about the tracks as regarding any threat to

our safety." Nor was it fear of the footprints' makers that led to the men building a permanent dwelling; they had been living in a tent, but mining required more supplies and equipment and a safe place to store them.

With endless amounts of raw material available, the men turned pine trees into squared-off logs, piled them into thick windowless walls, and chinked the spaces between with pine branches. The roof was built to withstand heavy snow, a stone fireplace provided heat, and water came from a spring a hundred yards away. They did not know it at the time, but the cabin was strong enough to withstand both the elements, and the residents, of Mt. St. Helens.

Gold and Gorillas

In July 1924, ore samples from the Vander White were assayed, and the claim's value estimated at approximately $2,000 a ton; if this proved accurate, the miners were on the verge of becoming rich men. Any anticipatory pleasure Beck felt was dulled by a toothache, and when he asked his father-in-law to drive him into town to get it pulled, the older man replied that "'God or the Devil' could not get him [Smith] away from there." It was also around this time that the thumping noises grew louder and more insistent.

For about a week they heard booming, "like something was hitting its self on its chest," which was joined by a "shrill

peculiar whistle each evening . . . coming from one ridge, and then . . . an answering whistling from another ridge."[15]

The sounds made Smith wary. He carried his Remington automatic when going for water on July 11 and asked Fred to accompany him and bring his .30-.30 Winchester.[16] According to the July 18, 1924, *Kelsonian*, they were on their way to the spring when a figure appeared on the other side of a small canyon, a hairy blackish-brown creature standing seven feet tall. Smith yelled and raised his rifle, and it dodged behind a pine tree. When the beast peeked around the trunk, he fired three times and exclaimed, "Don't worry about that devil, Fred, I got him right in the head!" The devil had a hard head and it reappeared two hundred yards away, running "fast and upright," giving Fred the chance to loose three more shots before the retreating figure was out of sight.

The men returned with water and told the others what happened, and everyone agreed that it was time to go. Smith's Ford was too far away for them to reach it before sundown, and not liking the idea of being in the woods after dark, they decided to wait till morning. After dinner they smoked their pipes, fastened the door shut, and went to bed: two in a bunk built into the wall and the rest on pine boughs on the floor.

Between cooking, smoking, and unwashed clothes, the atmosphere in the cabin must have been close, yet its inmates doubtless slept better having thick walls between themselves and the moonlit forest.

Night of the Mountain Devils

The assault began around midnight and, according to *I Fought the Apemen*, it started with a bang. Something struck the cabin with enough force to dislodge the chinking from between two of the logs onto Marion Smith and jolt the men awake. Smith was yelling, kicking, and waving his rifle, and, as Fred cleaned the debris off him, they heard what sounded like "a great number of feet trampling and rattling over a pile of our unused shakes." Everyone grabbed a pistol or rifle, and Beck and Smith looked through the space where the chinking had been and saw ape-men outside. The cabin was being pelted with rocks, and the miners improvised a plan to defend themselves.

> The only time we shot our guns that night was when the creatures were attacking our cabin. When they would quiet down for a few minutes, we would quit shooting. I told the rest of the party, that maybe if they saw we were only shooting when they attacked, they might realize we were only defending ourselves. We could have had clear shots at them through the opening left by the chinking had we chosen to shoot. We did shoot, however, when they climbed up on our roof. We shot round after round through the roof. We had to brace the hewed-logged door with a long pole taken from the bunk bed. The creatures

were pushing against it and the whole door vibrated from the impact. We responded by firing many more rounds through the door. They pushed against the walls of the cabin as if trying to push the cabin over, but this was pretty much an impossibility, as previously stated the cabin was a sturdy made building. Hank and I did most of the shooting—the rest of the party crowded to the far end of the cabin, guns in their hands. One had a pistol, which still is in my family's possession, the others clutched their rifles. They seemed stunned and incredulous.

A humorous thing I well remember was Hank singing: "If you leave us alone, we'll leave you alone, and we'll all go home in the morning." He did not mean it to be humorous, for Hank was dead serious, and sang under the impression that the "Mountain Devils" as he called them, might understand and go away.

At one point a hairy hand reached through the opening in the wall and grabbed an ax by the handle; Fred "swiftly turned the head of the axe upright, so that it caught on the logs; and at the same time Hank shot, barely missing my hand . . . [the] creature let go, and I pulled the handle back in, and put the axe in a safe place.[17]

They never saw more than three creatures at once, and there were quiet intervals, but the attacks continued until just before dawn, at which point the apes withdrew. When it was light enough to see clearly, the men ventured out and

saw one of the creatures standing at the edge of the canyon eighty yards away. Whether it was a straggler from the night before or an innocent giant hairy bystander, the men were not taking chances and Beck fired three times, toppling it over the cliff and down a gorge four hundred feet deep.[18]

Taking nothing but their packs and firearms, the men abandoned the cabin along with "about two hundred dollars in supplies, powder, and drilling equipment."

As they drove down the mountain, Fred suggested that they keep the attack a secret. Everyone agreed, including Marion Smith, who immediately told the rangers at Spirit Lake and then his friends in the Blue Ox Tavern at Kelso. According to Fred's son, Clifford, "my grandfather went down to the corner tavern and got a snootful. He blabbed the whole story."[19]

Sportsmen, reporters, and police converged on Mt. St. Helens in what became known as the Great Ape Hunt of 1924. The woods were full of people "armed with rifles and shotguns and pistols, and they're shooting at anything that moves."[20] Beck returned with two reporters and a detective to find the miners' possessions strewn about the cabin, the blasting powder missing, and at least one giant footprint. It was photographed, and pictures were taken of Fred and LeRoy Smith reenacting the siege.

Many dismissed the story as a hoax. Deputy game warden Justus Murk declared it was "[a]ll bunk."[21] When forest

rangers J. H. Huffman and W. M. Welch found a four-toed footprint, "Huffman . . . with the knuckles and palm of his right hand duplicated the imprint perfectly with the statement: 'They were made that way.'"[22] Over the years, the attack would be dismissed as either a hoax or a figment of the miners' imagination. It could have been group hysteria brought on by a rockslide, teenagers from the nearby YMCA summer camp rolling stones into the canyon, or prankster Rant Mullens, who claimed that he and his friends threw rocks at the cabin and made the tracks with giant carved wooden feet.

Wildly exaggerated versions of the story also appeared in print. On July 14, 1924, the *Berkeley (CA) Daily Gazette* reported that the miners were surrounded by "a cordon of thirty gorillas" and "200 rocks crashed through the roof to the floor of the shack." Newspapers also printed allegedly authentic Indian legends about mountain giants and renegade tribes, "much like giant apes in appearance who lived like wild animals in the secluded caves of the High Cascades."[23]

While reporters turned in their copy, Fred got his tooth pulled. He was leaving the dentist when a group of Yakima Indians told Beck about the "Selahtiks," beings that were "not like a man and not like a spirit, but in between."[24]

They traveled the mountain ranges, floated down rivers at night "like logs," and ran off with Indian women. Fred learned that if he ever saw one "to make sure I expressed to them that I was friendly [by taking] some cedar boughs and

[waving] it at them, and in that way they would know I had come in peace." The Yakima also told Beck something he already knew—ape-men hold grudges: "'If you ever harm one they will get even . . . They never forget.'"[25]

Nor was the miners' adventure likely to be forgotten around Mt. St. Helens, where it is preserved in local folklore and geography. The narrow gorge where the attack occurred has been "Ape Canyon" since 1924, and when an immense lava tube was discovered nearby in 1951, it was christened "Ape Cave."[26] Meanwhile, Fred Beck returned to a more or less ordinary routine of work, family, and psychic experiments.

After the Apes

Traumatic Sasquatch encounters have been known to sour people on the outdoors. When a Nootka trapper named Muchalat Harry was kidnapped by hairy giants in 1928, he escaped but never left his village again. There is nothing to suggest that Fred Beck suffered similar long-term effects, and though little has been written about his life after Ape Canyon, members of the Beck family tend to put their thoughts on paper.

> Our Uncle Fred impressed us. There was [a] uniqueness about him that filled the three of us with awe. It was our feeling that he could read our innermost thoughts.

As a child, I always tried to keep a chair between Uncle Fred and me. I felt he had "x-ray eyes," remembers June. "I didn't want him looking through me!"

The fifth son of the William Becks did seem to have currents of energy that were lacking in the other Becks. He seemed engrossed in various phases of "psychic phenomena."[27]

There is no evidence that Beck continued to hold séances or prospect for gold, but he did pursue an interest in psychic healing. Ronald Beck told a friend that "his Father [*sic*] Fred was very similar to Edgar Casy [Cayce]. He claimed Fred had psychic powers. That he could go into a trance and predict things."[28] (Edgar Cayce [1877–1945], "the Sleeping Prophet," gave countless trance readings. Most concerned people's health, with occasional departures into more arcane subjects, like Atlantis.) Some of Fred's family found the "faith-healing period" embarrassing.

Strangers drove out the Coweeman valley road looking for the residence of Dr. Beck. They came from places out of state and stopped to ask for direction to the "Doctor."

Well, our Uncle Fred was a self-appointed doctor. We didn't think of him as a real doctor so we tended to look the other way and ignore the requests. However, our parents politely gave out directions to the Alfred Beck home.[29]

At some point, Beck also overcame his reluctance to discuss what happened at Mt. St. Helens and "delighted in telling the story to family members whenever he got the chance."[30] One history includes this unexpected detail:

> Clifford said his dad received a telegram from the Federal Bureau of Investigation Washington, D.C. He remembers reading it. "Do not shoot the creatures [ape-men]. The Federal Government knows all about them. They are on official record." Or words to that effect, Cliff added.[31]

For those around him, living "in the same neighborhood as Uncle Fred added excitement to a quiet community," but Beck was not just a mystic. In 1956 he still worked at a Weyerhauser mill (producers of wood and paper) and continued there until around 1960, when his wife died and he was seventy-two years old.[32]

The Birth of Bigfoot Hunting

The attack at Ape Canyon remains a unique event, but the "Hairy Ape Hunt" that followed was not. Three years before Mt. St. Helens, Pennsylvanians were pursuing the "Gettysburg Gorilla," and in 1931 there was a search for a short hairy creature on Long Island, New York. Ralston, Mississippi, had a

"gorilla hunt" in 1952; a posse chased a peach-eating "Booger" at Clanton, Alabama, in 1960; and carloads of armed hunters set out after Texas's "Lake Worth Monster" in 1969. Similar ad hoc expeditions have taken place around the country, but it was the development of a more systematic approach to finding ape-men that led colorful old Uncle Fred to turn his colorful old story into a book.

In British Columbia during the mid-1950s, the Swiss emigrant Rene Dahinden and journalist John Green began a long-term, open-ended search for Sasquatch. Working independently and together, they interviewed witnesses and studied footprints and physical evidence, slowly piecing together a profile of the creatures as a species of bipedal primate. Hairy giants went from a regional to a national story in 1958, when enormous tracks appeared at a road construction site outside Bluff Creek, California.

A bulldozer operator named Jerry Crew poured plaster into the prints, and the *Humboldt Times* ran a photograph of him holding the cast of what looks like the bottom of a flat, human-looking foot, sixteen inches long with potato-sized toes. The Associated Press picked up the story, and the whole country was soon aware of "Big Foot."

Scottish-born naturalist Ivan Sanderson followed with a magazine piece, "The Strange Story of America's Abominable Snowman" (*True Magazine*, December 1959), which contains a detailed account of Crew's story and suggests that something like the Himalayan yeti lives in the Pacific North-

west. Sanderson wrote other articles about incidents from British Columbia, including William Roe's sighting of a female Sasquatch at Mica Mountain in 1955, and the Chapman family's encounter with a Bigfoot at Ruby Creek in 1941. As the public read about these events, most for the first time, investigators reexamined old cases like Ape Canyon and visited Fred Beck, the one witness willing to discuss it.

The Irish big-game hunter Peter Byrne claims to have spoken with him as early as 1960, but Byrne's account contains unlikely errors such as Beck claiming not to know what happened to the other men who were present in 1924. (Byrne also reports that the remains of the miners' cabin were still standing in 1972.)

Six years later Beck was interviewed by Roger Patterson, a rodeo cowboy from Yakima, Washington. Patterson's search for Bigfoot began after reading Sanderson's articles, and he quizzed the old man several times about Ape Canyon, the creatures, and their footprints. He wrote it up, added some embellishments ("Tremendous boulders began pelting their cabin roof followed by loud wailing that echoed hideously off the canyon walls"), and told the story in his 1966 book *Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?* Rene Dahinden met Beck around 1968, and John Green sometime in the late 1960s.

Green's interview did not go well. Though he believes that "something exciting" happened to the miners, "Fred Beck had told his story so often that he had established a set

pattern of things and there wasn't much use in asking further questions."[33] This agrees with Beck's nieces' account. They describe how at one "point Uncle Fred always closed his eyes as if to get a better look," and at another, "Uncle Fred always sighed here and brushed his right hand over his head."[34]

Decades later, John Green remembers the meeting with Beck as something out of the ordinary:

> I can recall talking to Fred Beck only once and it was a long time ago, my recollections are fragmentary, but I think I would remember if he had said anything about spiritualism, the occult etc. and I do not. What I do recall is that his son took a major role in the latter part of our conversation and insisted on showing me a photograph that he said included the image of someone who was not actually there . . .[35]

When Beck was a very old man he appeared in a documentary describing the creatures as having "big, big shoulders and small hips, and hairy . . . they looked like they was eight, nine, feet tall."[36] The ape-men might have grown over time, but physical details were less important to Fred Beck than what Ape Canyon revealed about the creatures' *true* nature. None of the Bigfoot hunters seemed interested in that aspect of the story, however, so Beck felt "it right that I express my views at last" and tell "the real facts after 43 years of silence" in a book.[37]

He dictated the story to his son Ronald, who later wrote, "I was close to my father, and believe me, his account is straight and true," but also told a friend that "the book was his [Ronald's] interpretation on his Father's story."[38] Do the contents of *I Fought the Apemen* reflect the elder Beck's beliefs?

Michael Perry, Fred's nephew, has "no doubts about Fred and his son Ronald discussing the [metaphysical] theory, but those words were written by Ron—Fred never talked like that."[39] John Green had the same response: "When I later read the *I Fought* . . . book my reaction was that it was more the son's book than Fred's. I presume that son was Ronald . . ."[40] By all accounts, Ronald held his father in high regard, and it is reasonable to assume that the results are a fair presentation of the elder Beck's ideas, if not his idiom. Since it is impossible to know who believed what, Fred will be referred to as the sole author. (Ronald died in September 2009, a month before work on this chapter began. Since it is impossible to know who believed what, Fred will be referred to as the sole author.)

The Metaphysics of Ape-Men

I Fought the Apemen is a patchwork: part memoir, part history, and part metaphysical disquisition. Its twenty-two pages are divided into five sections: "The Attack" is Beck's account of the siege, followed by a newspaper article, "Legendary

Mt. St. Helens Apemen Called Legitimate"[41]; "Background Events" describes Fred's early mystical experiences; "Questions and Answers" offers amusing anecdotes about the miners' time in the mountains, such as shooting rats off a sack of dynamite, and useful advice like "If you boil beans in the mountains, put on a good lid and be patient." Beck describes the ape-men as physical and spiritual beings and believes that UFOs expand consciousness by "confounding the wisdom of the proud and material minded" (he was probably familiar with the Maury Island incident, which involved doughnut-shaped UFOs that appeared sixty miles northeast of Kelso in June 1947). "Miscellaneous Selections" elaborates on events at Ape Canyon, and the booklet closes with "Theories on the Origin of Abominable Snowmen," which describes Earth in prehistoric times, Native American folklore, other Bigfoot encounters, and reflections on esoteric beliefs and higher consciousness.

For this discussion, the crucial point about Fred's metaphysical beliefs is that ape-men are a paranormal phenomenon, a concept that would not raise an eyebrow among the Yakima but was something new for white men. What he believed requires some explanation, and even then Fred found it "hard to classify a spiritual subject and apply a system to it."

Like many mystics, Beck sees the cosmos as consisting of many spheres, dimensions, or planes of existence. The different planes are often depicted as layers, with the physical, or

material, plane—the universe inhabited by humankind—sandwiched between higher and lower *immaterial* planes. All of them are inhabited by beings whose level of spiritual development, or consciousness, is consistent with the plane upon which they exist; beings with a primitive consciousness exist on lower levels, and those with higher consciousness in higher ones. Though the planes are separate, they overlap, and under certain circumstances nonphysical beings from other planes can manifest in the physical world.

One reason they might do this is an impulse common to all life, on every plane: the urge to evolve. This is not evolution in the sense of adapting to the environment but movement toward a higher form of consciousness, and ultimately, to the highest form of consciousness, which is human.

"Humanity," however, is more than the Homo sapiens who exist in the material plane, for the inhabitants of higher, nonphysical planes like Vander White and the Great Spirit, are also human. Moreover, the level of a spirit's consciousness determines how it will manifest in the physical world. Highly evolved spirits take noble and beautiful human forms, while beings with primitive consciousnesses from lower planes appear in crude or monstrous shapes.

Beck thought it was the miners' activities that first attracted the Sasquatch's attention, particularly blasting with dynamite. Since the ape-men's plane of existence is close to the material world, and the division between planes is thinner in the mountains, the creatures might have been watch-

ing the men invisibly. Curiosity and the impulse to evolve would have drawn them toward the miners' human consciousnesses and the earthly plane they inhabit.

The ape-men's manifestation seems to have been gradual, beginning with sounds and intermittent materializations that could have produced the solitary footprints in the sandbar. Perhaps the process was similar to what Col. Norbert Okolowicz and Dr. Gustave Geley witnessed at a series of séances by the Polish medium Teofil Modrzejewski.

Between 1919 and 1925, Modrzejewski, better known as "Franek Kluski" ("Frank Noodles," a name he might have adopted because mediums were not quite respectable) produced a number of remarkable materializations during his sittings, including animals that felt solid, gave off strong smells, and interacted with the sitters and surroundings. They included a hawk, an animal like a miniature lion, and an ape-man that the participants named "Primordial Man" or "Pithecanthropus."

Pithecanthropus first appeared in 1919 as a bundle of tangled hair accompanied by "smacking" sounds, it intrigued the sitters, which likely hastened its development. While the creatures at Mt. St. Helens stood about seven feet tall, had stout frames "more like a giant human than an ape," and were "hairy but not shaggy," Kluski's ape-man was something different. A photograph shows a smallish figure obscured by what looks like black gauze, but the fully realized Pithecanthropus had long, coarse, curly brown hair

with patches of gray and was strong enough to carry a fully loaded bookcase around the room. Its occasional outbursts of wild behavior could be frightening, but no one was ever threatened or harmed and the ape-man was so good-natured that it had to be discouraged from licking the sitters. Over time Pithecanthropus lost cohesion, reverted to smacking sounds, and finally vanished.

Though ape-men can be physically imposing and enormously strong, Beck considered them transients on the material plane, temporary constructs created by a "vibration of power and certain fine substances," whose bodies do not survive the spirit's return to its own dimension. The "fine substances" of which they are composed presumably disperse, and tangible proof of their existence disappears.

The mechanics of ape-man materialization are obscure, yet their motives at Ape Canyon appear straightforward; what began with natural attraction to the miners' consciousnesses was followed by retaliation at the miners' unprovoked violence. "Our mistake," Beck writes, "was shooting them."

I Fought the Apemen of Mt. St. Helens was privately printed in 1967, but few people saw it, or a later edition, and Fred Beck's mystical explorations remain "a bit of a 'taboo' subject with conventional researchers."[42] The only firsthand written account of Ape Canyon could not be ignored, though, and a sort of compromise emerged.

Rene Dahinden is a good example of a researcher who was notably impatient with the paranormal. A story is told about

him following giant footprints that abruptly ended in the middle of a field. Someone suggested, jokingly perhaps, that the Bigfoot flew away, and Dahinden turned and left without saying a word. Nevertheless, the notoriously prickly Canadian interviewed Beck, wrote about Ape Canyon, read all of *I Fought the Apemen*, and even brought out a new edition. Like many others he probably "concluded that Fred had gone a little strange in his old age" and "*just ignored the paranormal stuff.*"[43]

Fred Beck died on June 1, 1972, at age eighty-three, and since then a new generation of enthusiasts has appeared for whom the history of Bigfoot began at Bluff Creek, California, in 1967, when Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin filmed a female Sasquatch. With new cases to investigate and technologies to apply, Ape Canyon is a low priority, and, as Loren Coleman points out: "[W]hat exactly happened is slowly being lost in mountain fog."

Gold Diggers

Barring the discovery of some forgotten document it is unlikely that the fog will clear. Cryptozoologists have picked over Beck's accounts for clues about the creature's anatomy and behavior, noted the story's contradictions and inconsistencies, and almost unanimously "ignored the paranormal stuff." Beck, a Spiritualist influenced by esoteric schools of thought, was just as removed from certain ideas as the most

scientific Bigfoot hunter, and, in the end, neither the mystic nor the cryptozoologists recognized that *I Fought the Apemen* is a magical treasure-hunting story.

There is a long history of magical treasure hunting in America. It was widely believed that the country was peppered with pirates' gold, misers' hoards, and lost mines, that Indian graves were filled with valuables, and gnomes collected enormous stockpiles of gold and gems in subterranean caves. The notebook of one eighteenth-century money-digger lists the locations of dozens of treasures ("Mrs. Downing of Wair Informs that there is a mine of silver at ye flat rock on Coy's hill in Brookfield"), and places like Bristol Notch, Vermont, were "honeycombed with holes a few feet in depth, where generations of money-diggers have worked their superstitious energies"[44] searching for gold stolen from a Spanish galleon.

On July 20, 1822, the *Lycoming Gazette* (Williamsport, Pennsylvania) reported, "We could name if we pleased five hundred respectable men who do, in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts, verily believe that immense treasures lie concealed in the Green Mountains; many of whom have been, for a number of years, most industriously and perseveringly engaged in digging it up." Moreover, the article encouraged readers to take up "the mineral [divining] rod and discover a fortune," which leads to the *other* popular belief underpinning magical treasure hunting: that occult methods for finding it worked.

They involved spell casting, nocturnal ceremonies, and communicating with spirits, but despite its resemblance to witchcraft (and even grave robbing), magical treasure hunting was not beyond the pale. It may not have been discussed in polite company, but treasure hunting experienced several waves of popularity during which unknown numbers of citizens were slipping out after dark carrying shovels, swords, and spell books.

The actual money-digging process could be simple or elaborate, but the first step consisted of figuring out where to dig. It might be revealed in dreams, or by a ghost ("'Raise this rock,' said a voice . . . the young man worked most of the night [and] [u]nder it, in old coins, he found money enough to last him the rest of his life").[45] Legends like the story about Spanish gold at Bristol Notch provide a general idea where to look, but some form of magic, such as dowsing, was needed to find to find the precise location.

Dowsing was a popular form of divination that employed rods, pendulums, or other devices colloquially known as "doodlebugs" that signaled the presence of hidden treasure. An Indiana farmer named Wait, for example, used a pendulum weighted with a "mineral ball" that revolved when it was over precious metals, but there were more exotic methods, such as the "peep stones" or "seer stones" employed by the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith Jr. As a young man he used them to see underground treasures just as he later used the holy seer stones, Urim and Thummim, to translate the

Golden Plates into the *Book of Mormon*. Some money-diggers hired diviners like Smith or practiced magic themselves.

Necromancy, the conjuring and questioning of spirits, was the most effective way to discover and secure treasure. "Spells and incantations" with power over spirits is doubly necessary, "first to call up a spirit who shall disclose the right spot and second, to control the demon who keeps the hoard."[46] The "demon" is the spirit that stands guard and must be restrained from attacking the men or moving the treasure out of reach.

When the right location was found, some money-diggers drove an iron spear into the ground to "pin" it in place, while others practiced elaborate rituals. In "A method to Tak [*sic*] up hid Treasure," Silas Hamilton, the enthusiastic hunter whose notebook listed the local buried treasures, described a way of laying out a magic circle that kept the gold in place:

> Tak Nine Steel Rods about ten or twelve Inches in Length Sharp or Piked to Perce in to the Erth, and let them be Besmeared with fresh blood from a hen mixed with hog-dung. Then mak two Surkels Round the hid Treasure one of Sd Surkels a Little Larger in Surcumference than the hid Treasure lays in the Erth the other Surkel Sum Larger still, and as the hid treasure is wont to move to North or South East or west Place your Rods as is Discribed on the other sid of this leaf. [The other side of the page shows the rods laid out in a wheel-shaped pattern.][47]

Many treasure hunters used a ritual sword or dagger to scratch a magic circle into the ground around the area to be excavated, then cast a spell. It might include hymns, Bible readings, or animal sacrifices, but "[s]hould someone carelessly mutter or curse," the enchantment would be broken, and "the treasure guardians could penetrate the circle or carry the treasure through the earth."[48] Digging was done in perfect silence and as the men worked, spirits attempted to confuse and frighten them with phantom storms, fires, ghosts, demons, and monsters.

It must have been unnerving work, scooping dirt out of a dark hole in the middle of the night while a shrieking corpse or giant black pig stalked the outer perimeter of the magic circle, and someone invariably spoke or, more likely, swore whereupon the unprotected diggers ran for their lives, arriving home empty-handed and, in some cases, with their hair turned white from terror. What frightened them?

Most treasure guardians were spirits of the dead. The ghost of the treasure's former owner might stand guard, or, in the case of piratical booty, a member of the burying party or other unfortunate was killed for the purpose (these ghosts seem to have been especially angry). There were phantom animals as well, including fiery-eyed dogs and cats, wild horses, and diabolical livestock. A talking toad threatened to murder treasure hunters at Niagara County, New York, while reptiles, particularly snakes, recall the ancient role of dragons as guardians of the Golden Fleece and other treasures. Snakes

also represent Satan, and riches acquired through sin and bloodshed, then hidden within the earth, tended to attract infernal attention.

Five hundred little devils watched over a hoard of silver buried in Safe Harbor, Pennsylvania, and a treasure hunter digging near Dighton Rock, a boulder covered with mysterious carvings at Berkley, Massachusetts, saw "the devil, equipped with all his paraphernalia of tail and horns and cloven hoof, mocking and laughing at him."[49]

There were also beings intimately connected to the Earth, including dwarfish elemental gnomes and gigantic children of the goddess Gaia, which, "[b]ecause of their size and strength . . . made formidable guardians."[50] Joseph Smith Jr. reportedly saw a group of money-diggers routed by a giant standing eight or nine feet tall, and Mr. Wait had an even more alarming encounter. While excavating a hole, he looked up and "beheld a huge millstone suspended above him by a thread, and a giant negro standing by with scissors ready to cut the thread and cause the stone to fall upon him."[51]

Wait survived the millstone (as well as a phantom flood and spectral wild horses), and when he died around 1900, an attempt was made to overturn his will based "largely on the fact that the testator . . . had . . . been imbued with the belief that he possessed the power to locate hidden treasure."[52] The court did not consider magical treasure hunting a sufficient reason to overturn the will, but the case of *Wait v. Westfall* demonstrates how the rational, more or less scientific, worldview

that came to dominate public life during the nineteenth century had turned a once-popular pastime into evidence of incompetence or insanity.

While powwow doctors might have been curing hexed cattle in Pennsylvania, root magic flourished in the South, and a vampire was killed at Rhode Island in 1892, such activities were increasingly regarded as the eccentric behavior of superstitious provincials.

Stories about pirate's gold and lost mines are still told, of course, and there is no shortage of hopeful fortune hunters searching for them, but at some point the use of rituals and spells vanished in the United States. What might its adepts, men like Silas Hamilton, Joseph Smith Jr., and Mr. Wait, have made of *I Fought the Apemen of Mt. St. Helens*? Would they recognize the events of 1924 as something akin to their experiences?

The Secret of Ape Canyon

At first reading, Beck's account seems remote from the world of grimoires and buried doubloons. He does not mention any legends about lost mines or hidden gold at Mt. St. Helens, not even a rumor of the sort mentioned by Albert Ostman (discussed shortly). On July 16, 1924, however, the *Seattle Daily Times* reported that "[i]n the vicinity" of the Vander White mine was "a fable of a wonderfully wealthy gold deposit . . .

worked by Yakima Indians." These "pioneer reminiscences" described "Indians bringing great quantities of gold from these mountains and then the supply ceasing when several Indians were killed mysteriously."

Beck's account contains little in the way of folklore or superstition, and there is nothing to suggest that he was familiar with ritual magic, yet Spiritualism was not as removed from sorcery as its adherents claimed. Skeptics thought fraud and credulity explained the phenomena, but others accepted the manifestations as real, if not new. For them it was a revival of necromancy, literally "corpse divining," the ancient form of sorcery used by the Witch of Endor to raise the spirit of Samuel for King Saul (1 Samuel 28).

How the witch went about it is unknown, but the Greek enchantress Circe had a method that involved prayers to the dead and a freshly dug trench filled with honey, milk, wine, and the blood of a ram and ewe, a mixture that gave spirits the strength to speak. Later techniques were more gruesome.

Necromancy was practiced in graveyards at night by the light of lamps that burned human fat and had a piece of shroud for a wick. Practitioners drew magical circles on the ground, made sacrifices, and dug up fresh corpses for rituals whose resemblance to magical treasure hunting is not coincidental, for necromancy was often used to find gold. The advent of Spiritualism, however, rendered such grotesque practices obsolete.

Séances made "communicating with the dead at once

easy, practical, and comfortable. This was the method truly suited to our habits and the refinement of our civilization, and there is no need whatever to go into cemeteries . . . in short, the necromantic craft of the witch has been advantageously replaced by spiritualism."[53]

One important difference between the miners' method of searching for gold and traditional magic was the latter's use of magical spells to shield participants from hostile spirits and protection that was lost if someone spoke. Beck never says that the men thought they were shielded by Spiritualism, or, if they did, that it depended on keeping silent; yet consider events leading up to the discovery of the mine.

The Great Spirit presumably shot the phantom arrow into the sky that led the men on a four-day trek over difficult terrain. Beck does not record anything being said during that time, not until Marion Smith cursed the Great Spirit, whereupon they were told, "[Y]ou will be shown where there is gold, but it is not given you." Smith had broken the spell, allowing guardian spirits to move the "buried treasure" out of the hunters' reach, and lost the miners' equivalent of "magical protection."

> For six years all had been peaceful . . . *and an aura of good or spiritual power surrounded us* . . . But one of us had lost his temper and denounced the spirit leading us a liar, from that time on a quiet apprehensiveness settled over us. We continued working our claim, but down deep we felt it would avail to no good end.[54] [my italics]

Someone remarked, "We just as well pack up and go home," and old-fashioned treasure hunters like Hamilton or Wait would have agreed.

While most traditional treasure hunts seem to have taken place in the course of a single night, events at Ape Canyon unfolded at a leisurely pace. The miners worked for two fruitless years before giants drove them from the mountains, which raises the question of why they were attacked at all. There was no headlong flight from the mountains, but two years of fruitless work before giants drove them away, which raises the question of why they were attacked at all.

Fred Beck believed it was revenge for shooting the ape-man, but what if the "good assay" was accurate and the miners were, as they believed, on the verge of discovering gold? That is when the spirits manifested and drove away the Spiritualists with the same fury visited on their spell-casting predecessors, and leaving them just as empty-handed. Beck wrote, "the fact is that we never took any [gold] out. A few nuggets was the only gold I ever obtained, and they were found in different locations."[55]

The idea that Ape Canyon is a magical treasure-hunting story, and Bigfoot are guarding hidden gold, may seem improbable, but, like traditional earth spirits, Sasquatch are enormous and primitive, throw stones like giants, and are associated with the underground knocking noises characteristic of gnomes (and responsible for the regional name "tommyknockers"); in some certain alternative-reality circles

ape-men are also believed to mine gold for aliens, another gnomish trait. Then there is the other classic Bigfoot incident that occurred during the summer of 1924.

Albert Ostman was camping in the wilderness of coastal British Columbia's Toba Inlet when he was carried off and held captive by a family of Sasquatch for six days. Ostman escaped and kept the incident to himself until 1957, when he told the story in an official affidavit and swore an oath to its truth.

Experts studied the account, evaluating the description of the creatures' anatomy, rudimentary language, and technology, and even the amount of time they spent gathering edible plants and whether its nutritional value was adequate to sustain primates of their alleged size. Ivan Sanderson's interview with Albert Ostman concentrated on "certain zoological or anthropological details" and the questions were loaded "with snares and abstruse technical catches . . . ," yet for all this careful investigation, one point is passed over without comment: Ostman's reason for being at the Toba Inlet.[56] "There was allegedly a lost gold mine thereabouts and he decided to take a crack at finding it."[57] Like the miners at Ape Canyon, he might have succeeded had a group of Bigfoot not intervened.

Beings of Earth

In some respects, Sasquatch resemble treasure guardians. Like giants of folklore and mythology, they are enormous,

throw stones, live in wildernesses, and are mixtures of animal and human traits. This hybrid quality has been characteristic of giants since the earliest times, with the "earth-born" serpent-legged Gigantes of classical mythology and the hair-covered wodewoses of medieval folklore; it continues today in the belief that contemporary giants are "ape-men." The similarities between Sasquatch and gnomes are less obvious.

Since miners work underground and are in contact with valuable mineral deposits, they are among those most likely to encounter gnomes: elemental spirits that appear as small, dark, malformed men dressed as miners, who are seldom seen but can be heard "knocking and hammering as if three or four smiths were at work . . ." Fred Beck and his party heard subterranean noises at Mt. St. Helens:

> . . . the same thudding, hallow thumping noise we heard at night preceding the attack, we also had heard in broad daylight, although not nearly so loud . . . like there's a hollow drum in the earth somewhere and something is hitting it.[58]

He offers no explanations for the sounds, but decades later, Jack "Kewaunee" Lapseritis, who believes Bigfoot are an alien race of wise, interdimensional nature spirits, experienced something comparable at a campsite on Oregon's Cascade Mountains:

"Errr-rump, errr-rump, errrrr-rump," an eerie mechanical sound had begun . . . like that of a pumping action with a generator slipping its gears. But what was it? The muffled grinding of gears seemed to be coming from within the earth![59]

Lapseritis implies that the "errr-rumping" comes from a subterranean facility operated by aliens and guarded by Sasquatch. That repetitive underground noises should occur in what are nominally Bigfoot cases suggests some kind of affinity between ape-men and gnomes that is realized in alternative-reality circles.

Lyle Vann, Director of the Arizona Bigfoot Center, also believes ape-men are associated with aliens, but that the Sasquatch are mining gold for extraterrestrials who use it in the electronics of their spaceships. "The creatures are nocturnal. They live in subterranean caves. The aliens use ape-men for mining because they are strong, gentle creatures."[60] (Mining even explains Bigfoot's odor. "'Many people think Bigfoot smells—that he has a bad smell,' Vann said. 'That's not the case in Arizona. The reason is because there is not a lot of sulfur in the ground here. In California, there's a lot of sulfur underground and it gets into the Bigfoot's coat because Bigfoot lives underground. That is what makes them smell.'")[61]

While Vann's ape-men have gnomish habits and occupations, the situation is reversed in a tale from the Sierra Madres

in which a gnomelike child, a "hunchbacked dwarf" employed in a mine, is transformed into a treasure-guarding "Sasquatch."

> The story is that when Mexico was first settled by the Spaniards this mine was worked by the natives, and when it was discovered how rich it was the invaders ruthlessly slaughtered every person whom they found working in the place except a lad who was employed carrying water to the miners. He fled at the approach of the Spaniards and saved his life. This boy was a hunchbacked dwarf, and when he found that all his friends and relatives had been murdered he took a horrible oath of revenge, selling his soul to the evil one for the ability to avenge himself. He was given the power to bring destruction upon any one who went into the mine to work, and it is this, which has brought destruction to those who have attempted to get the rich ore from the demon's mine. The story had its origins centuries ago, but there is not a native of Chihuahua who does not have implicit faith in it. They still refuse steadily to work in the mine and tell of many people who have met horrible deaths in the pit.
>
> The demon is said to resemble a huge ape, with hairy body and long powerful arms. It is misshapen, and with deep sunken eyes is seen peering around a corner of the shaft just before it wreaks its vengeance upon the men who are toiling in the rocks and dirt.[62]

The illustration shows three miners dropping tools and fleeing a Bigfoot-like "demon."

Apparently earth-elementals in the shape of ape-men were driving off treasure hunters long before Beck's party escaped in Marion Smith's Ford. It was at Ape Canyon, however, that the ancient art of magical treasure hunting intersected with the aspiring science of cryptozoology and began a long, uncomfortable association in the pages of *I Fought the Apemen.*

Before we conclude this perhaps overlong discussion about monsters guarding buried treasure, there are other places where this old idea might apply.

Mound Monsters

In 1989–1990, writer and researcher Linda Godfrey was a reporter covering sightings of a werewolflike creature on a stretch of road at Elkhorn, Wisconsin. She christened it "the Beast of Bray Road" and went on to collect historical and contemporary eyewitness descriptions of bipedal wolves, "dogmen," and four-footed "hell hounds" seen throughout the upper Midwest. A map was created showing the location of each encounter, and it led to an unexpected connection.

Godfrey was reading *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin*, by Robert A. Birmingham and Leslie E. Eisenberg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), when she saw a map showing

the locations of "effigy mounds," ancient earthworks laid out in the shapes of animals, men, and spirits, that caused "a few dozen lightbulbs" to go off in her head.

> Their map of Wisconsin shows major groupings of animal effigy mounds, with different types represented by tiny symbols. It suddenly occurred to me that the placement of the symbols . . . corresponded very closely to a map I had made showing the main concentration of Manwolf sightings around the state!
>
> I made a transparency of my map, sized to fit the one in the book and voila, the connection was undeniable. I couldn't place sightings to exact locations of the mounds, say within a few feet or yards, in every instance, but the distribution of the two phenomena was very much the same . . . some discrepancies should be expected, since the mounds are stationary but the creatures seem to have free ability to roam. Even taking that into consideration, I still think the way the two maps coincide is remarkable. It seems more than mere coincidence, in fact.[63]

She offers several possible explanations. The creatures might be guarding sacred sites, or their tendency to appear near mounds shaped like long-tailed "water panthers" could mean they are water spirits of the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tradition. She also suggests that the mounds were built to *contain*

spirits and did so until they "were cut open, plowed under and otherwise desecrated by settlers . . . [whereupon] the guardians may have been set free. That would explain the proximity of these creatures to the mound areas, as well as why it was so important to place mounds everywhere and go to such lengths in their construction and design."[64]

To an old-time magical treasure hunter, however, the reason would be obvious: wolf and dog monsters are standing guard over valuables buried inside the mounds The association between apparitions and hidden wealth survived well into the twentieth century, so when a woman in Sandfly, Georgia, encountered a gnome complete with "a lill tin lamp" on his head "wut gleamed in duh dahk," the experience was frightening, yet easily explained, for "[d]ey say he's comin roun cuz deah's *buried treasure* neah yuh."[65] If the Americans that settled Wisconsin in the early nineteenth century had monster sightings like those collected by Godfrey it may explain why so much treasure hunting went on in the mounds.

Before chasing that idea down a rabbit hole, however, it is better to return to Ape Canyon.

Giants in the Woods and Imagination

The attack on the miners' cabin was not the only strange incident at Ape Canyon. Twenty-six years later, in 1950, an

experienced mountaineer and skier named Jim Carter vanished, leaving a ski trail that suggested he was desperately trying to escape from *something* and raising suspicions that "the mountain devils got him."[66] Thirty years after that, on May 18, 1980, Mt. St. Helens exploded.

It was a monstrous eruption; a vast swath of countryside was pulverized, forests flattened, lakes emptied, and surrounding areas buried under millions of tons of volcanic ash. Ape Canyon lay outside the path of direct destruction, but melting snow created a torrent of mud and debris that flooded the canyon, carried off the forest, and scoured away any traces of the miners' presence that might have survived the intervening years (though recent investigations have discovered possible fragments of their cabin). Rumors claimed that Bigfoot corpses were found during the cleanup and that they were hastily burned or whisked away, like crashed flying saucers.

As an historical incident, Ape Canyon is a fading oddity. Most of Beck's account is unpalatable to cryptozoologists, while his belief in the spiritual inferiority of ape-men does not appeal to mystics that want their Bigfoot to be wise, magical, and ecologically concerned. With no group claiming that their interpretation of *I Fought the Apemen* is correct, it can be approached without preconceptions. The magical treasure hunt interpretation is consistent with the story's contents and changes it from something at the fringe of

cryptozoology literature to a fairly representative example of buried-treasure lore. In fact, it points to another way of understanding Ape Canyon, since

> the basis for such legendary quests [treasure hunts] may lie in symbolic traditions of late antiquity . . . in which "treasures" stood for specific attainments sought on the path to wisdom and knowledge. Guardians block access to these inner treasures and can be commanded only by those who possess secret passwords and geometrical symbols . . . Later traditions may be seen as literalizations of Gnostic doctrine by those with no understanding of its symbolic significance: the treasures become "real" hoards, but access to them continues to depend upon knowing the proper magic words and geometric forms.[67]

From this perspective, the search for gold in *I Fought the Apemen* becomes a metaphor for seeking wisdom. The creatures represent what is primitive in human nature and, because the miners do not master those aspects of themselves, they fail to attain knowledge. This idea can be applied to Bigfoot hunting in general, which then becomes a process for subduing the ape-man in oneself in order to subdue the ape-man in the woods. Perhaps that is why Fred Beck, who did not believe that Sasquatch could be caught or killed, thought that searching for them brought one to the "gates of psychi-

cism." On a more prosaic level, connecting monsters and hidden treasure suggests that a really thorough Bigfoot hunter's equipment should include a metal detector and a shovel.

I Fought the Apemen of Mt. St. Helens repays close reading. Fred Beck concedes that his theories depend on the creatures' existence not being proven, for "[i]f someone captured one, I would have to swallow most of the content of this book." Until that happens, though, Bigfoot will continue to wander through the mountains, forests, and swamps of North America, moving between planes of existence, mining gold for aliens, and transforming those who search for them.